

From: Tim Kiley [<mailto:tkiley@kesq.com>]
Sent: Thursday, July 22, 2010 11:38 PM
To: 'bsmith'; 'Bob Allen'; 'Mike Stutz'; rtarpening@kesq.com
Subject: Radio Transition spells trouble for KESQ

I need to make you all aware of a disturbing meeting that took place today.

Members of the press were invited to attend a meeting regarding ERICA

(The Eastern Riverside Interoperable Communications Authority, known as ERICA, which includes the cities of Indio, Desert Hot Springs, Palm Springs, Beaumont and Cathedral City, was established as a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) in December 2008. The City of Palm Springs has developed the first phase of implementation of the 800 MHz digital communication system that will benefit its Police Department, Fire Department and Public Services, and will have an extensive range of communication ability with other first responders.)

The purpose of this meeting was to give the media information about the changes to emergency communications and how it will effect our ability to hear over the scanners.

Present was myself, John Cook and David Minium (Assignment Manager) from KPSP and Kate Glover, News Director for KMIR. The Desert Sun was not there, and Gene Nichols was the only radio rep. So four of us represented TV News, and about 35 high level police were there to represent the various departments.

This meeting started off on the wrong foot and went down hill from there. The second speaker, Richard Banasiak stated that the committee had decided that all the new radios would be encrypted and that information would not be shared with the media. I asked what solutions they had come up with to share information with the media, and the answer was that they would instruct watch commanders to call the media when events required it. I said that this was unacceptable. For the departments to decide which stories will be shared with the media and which ones will not is down right censorship. I explained that our responsibility was to not only report the news but to provide some oversight into what police agencies were doing.

We were then told that Palm Springs would be the first to use the new radios and that this will start on August 2nd.

I expressed my frustration that after 4 or 5 years of planning that the media was brought in at the 11th hour when it would be too late to implement anything before the switch. The group agreed to start a committee with media representatives to discuss the issue. I stated that this too was unacceptable. A committee wouldn't even meet before August 2nd and that one day, even one hour was too much time to be without access to police radios. I also told them that on August 2nd if we didn't have any access to the police frequencies we would have to tell our viewers that the City of Palm Springs has decided that it no longer wants to share information with its residents. I also expressed my frustration that the media is not being considered a first responder, and that when the big earthquake hits they will need our help.

On a side note, Fire radios will NOT be affected by this. They will continue to use the old system and have NO plans to switch over.

Kate from KMIR suggested that they lease us the radios like Riverside County Sheriff does, and we were told they would not be doing that.

In summary... on August 2nd Palm Springs Police will switch to the new system and we will no longer be able to hear them. This will include Search and Rescue. They have agreed to run "in parallel" with the old system until August 12th to buy some time, but I wasn't convinced. Then city by city they will switch over in a time line that was not shared with us as of yet.

Without trying to be overly dramatic, I believe this move to be a serious threat to the freedom of the press in the Coachella Valley. The police should not have the right to control what we can and cannot report. I am told that they will be considering the matter in a meeting this evening and will get back to us with the results of that meeting. I believe we should be prepared in case they do not change their minds.

I wonder if other cities / stations are dealing with this, and if any of this has gone to court yet?

I just wanted to keep everyone in the loop and look for options on how we should proceed.

Thanks and sorry for the long e-mail.

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